

1526 73-8
The Means of redressing, and the Duty of forgiving Injuries consider'd.

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the

A S S I Z E S,

Held for the County of

Bucks, at Buckingham,

Before the HONOURABLE

Mr. JUSTICE *CLIVE*,

A N D

Mr. JUSTICE *BIRCH*,

On *Tuesday, July 8. 1755.*

By GEORGE PERIAM, M.A. Student
of *Christ-Church, Oxford*, and Minister of
Lathbury in Buckinghamshire.

Publish'd at the Request of the High-Sheriff,
and Grand-Jury.

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Sept. 16. 1755.

To the Worshipful
 HENRY UTHWAT, Esq. High-Sheriff,
 AND TO
 The Gentlemen of the Grand-Jury
 of the County of *Bucks*;

Viz.

The Right Honourable Earl VERNEY.
 The Honourable GEORGE GRENVILLE, Esq.

Richard Lowndes,
 Mathew Knapp,
 George Wrighte,
 Henry Purefoy,
 George Denton,
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Esquires.

Thomas Huckle,
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 Robert Perrot,
 Thomas Cooke,
 James Perkins,
 George Goodman,
 William Prior,

Gentlemen.

The following Discourse publish'd at
 their Request, is with all Respect in-
 scrib'd by

Their most obedient

Humble Servant,

GEO. PERIAM.

M A T T. V. 39.

But I say unto You, that Ye resist not Evil.

THOUGH it is certainly an Argument of the best, because the most Christian Temper, to pass by an Injury, yet so far are the Generality of Mankind from endeavouring to restrain their Resentments on any slight Offence given them, that they seem dispos'd to resist whatever carries the least Appearance of Evil. A Word inconsiderately, and in a Passion thrown out, shall be term'd a Reflection on their Honour, and it frequently happens, that they cannot be perswaded to think any Thing sufficient to wash out the Stain, but the Blood of the Offender. The Precept therefore in the Text, they judge accommodated to Such only as either are not sensible of an Affront, or dare not resent it. But Men, who have the least Regard to their Reputation, will not put up Affronts, which, they

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think,

think, it becomes them to revenge; or bear Evils they can so easily avert. In short, the Doctrine of our Saviour does not suit with their Humour, and therefore they will not be oblig'd by it. The Inconveniencies, that must necessarily attend the Observers, may sufficiently, they hope, excuse the Observance of it.

Now though no Injunction can be more positive than that in the Text, *Resist not Evil*, usher'd in with Words which challenge the utmost Attention, *but I say unto You*; yet least this Precept shou'd either by weak Men be misunderstood; or afford Advantage to bad Men from the Readiness of such as are of a quiet and easy Temper to comply with them; least Insolence and Injustice, which ought ever to be suppress'd, shou'd find Encouragement, and the best Rule be perverted to the worst of Ends; least Men shou'd do Evil, and hope notwithstanding to go unpunish'd; It may not be thought altogether unnecessary to shew, how the Words, *Resist not Evil*, are to be taken. For it is not here to be suppos'd, that we shou'd lay ourselves open to the Insults of all, who wou'd willingly grieve, or oppress us; It is not to be imagined, (so necessary is Self-Preservation) that we shou'd not provide against Dangers, which threaten us, or
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fence off Evils, we see coming upon us ; —
Therefore I shall consider

First, the Nature of those Evils, which we may lawfully resist, and the Course we are to take in resisting them.

Secondly, what we are commanded not to resist, and the Motives to this Duty.

But before I proceed to treat of these Heads, I shall lay down this general Rule ; That no private Revenge, let the Injury be what it will, is at any Time, or upon any Account justifiable. — Indeed to stand upon our own Defence is not only allowable, but very often requisite and necessary ; but *personally* to revenge ourselves is unlawful.

Which will appear from the following obvious Reasons.

I. No one certainly ought to assume a Power which does not belong to Him. It is only for the Powers that are ordained of God, to execute the Authority that is given by God. Since then we are sensible, that Vengeance is of the Lord alone, or of such as have a Power delegated to them from Him ; we must not encroach upon their Prerogative, and take *their* Office upon us, who alone are possess'd of the Sword of Jus-

tice for the Punishment of Evil-doers. For all private Persons, let the Constitution of the Government they are in be what it will, are so far upon an Equality, that no Consideration will warrant their revenging themselves one upon another.

2. Moreover, we know, that *Revenge* is properly a Judicial Act, and no one is ever allow'd at the same Time to be a Party and Judge. For in Case of Injuries receiv'd, when we appeal to a Person, who can do us Justice, we are not therefore redress'd, because *We* think our Complaint just, but because *He* whom we appeal to, finds we have been wrong'd. We may very likely have the Right, but we must leave another to give it, on our Side. Let Him decide the Cause, whom God has made Judge; Let Him put the Laws in Execution, whom God has entrusted with so great an Office.

3. Another Reason to be given against *private* Revenge is, That it can never answer the End, which shou'd be propos'd in taking it. For in revenging Injuries a special Regard ought to be had to these Things.

That it may have such an Influence upon the injurious Person, as to make him sensible of his Fault. — That it may discourage others from making the like Attempt. — That it may be a Security for the future to the Person injur'd.

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But He who takes *private* Revenge, is not likely to compass any of these Ends, but on the contrary rather *provokes*, and *enrages* his *Adversary*, gives *Offence* to *Others*, and brings more *Trouble* upon *Himself*.

So that if we had no Respect either to Christianity, Reason, or Justice, the bare consulting our own Ease, and Quiet, shou'd so far prevail upon us, as to make us harbour no Thoughts of *private* Revenge.

But if this was once a receiv'd Opinion, and the Law wou'd give Way to it, That every Man might, when he conceiv'd Himself to be injur'd, without making an Appeal to another's Judgment, redress Himself as he thought fit, either by Craft, or Violence; the Sacred Ties of Religion wou'd soon be dissolv'd, Virtue utterly extirpated, and Iniquity establish'd. Confusion, Desolation, Rapine, and Blood, and even worse Consequences than these, if worse can be conceiv'd wou'd quickly ensue. For if Men were to sit Judges in their own Cause, and no Law restrain'd them from doing themselves Right in their own Way; if all, who thought they had Reason to complain, might put their own Sentence in Execution, not only Right to our Possession, wou'd be precarious, but even our Lives always in Danger.

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This therefore being premis'd, and prov'd,
That all *private* Revenge whatsoever is utterly
unlawful, I come now to consider,

1. What those Evils are, which we are allow'd to resist, and the Way we are to take in resisting them.

Herein are included all Such in general as are too great to be born ; Such as Christianity does not forbid, right Reason directs, and common Justice obligeth us to resist : — Such as, though levell'd at a private Man, strike at the Foundation of Government, and tend to the Violation of Laws, without which there can be no Security in any Common-Wealth : — Or, in short, all such Injuries as shall be judg'd, by the Wisest and Best of Men, not fit to be pass'd by.

It is necessary that the *violent* shou'd be *restrain'd*, and the *unjust punished*, as well that *They* may be *reclaimed*, as that *Others*, observing their ill Success may be *prevented* from *sinning*. For as Men seeing others sinning prosperously, meeting with neither Punishment, nor Reprehension, are apt to follow the same Course, expecting to meet with the same Indulgence ; So it holds on the other Side also, that they are frequently *deterr'd* from doing ill, when they consider the Shame and Punishments, that are both the Attendants,
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and Consequences of Sin. — So that as well Charity (for the greatest Tenderness may go along with a Prosecution) I say then, as well Charity to the Persons injuring us, and an Endeavour to prevent the same Sin in others; as the Security of ourselves, and a Right of maintaining the publick Good; lay a strong Obligation upon us to resist such Evils as all indifferent Persons shall judge in their own Nature insupportable, or in their Consequences pernicious. To prevent such Mischiefs as arise from Licentiousness, and wou'd of Course be hurtful to the Community and destructive of Order and Government; the Sanction of Civil Establishment is added to Christianity, and thereby a Power of redressing Injuries in general granted by publick Authority to all Ranks and Degrees of Men:

Which leads me to the next Enquiry. For since the Unlawfulness of *private* and *personal* Revenge appears on several Accounts,

What Method must be taken in resisting Evils?
— We must have Recourse to the Magistrates, who are appointed by, and derive their Power from God; whose indispensable Duty it is to defend those from wrong, who are under their Care and Charge; to work upon Offenders by Punishments suitable to their Offences, or remove such Instruments of Wickedness, as are unworthy

thy of *All*, but more especially *Christian Society*. They are not to bear the Sword in vain, but to execute Wrath on them that do Evil, and by this Means discourage, and suppress, as much as possible, all Kind of Vice, and Immorality. For what Purpose are Laws enacted, and what is the Design of the frequent Returns of these Solemnities, but to direct the Ignorance, to restrain the Exorbitances, and control the licentious Practices of unruly Men? Our Saviour never intended to set aside the Force of Laws; for *the Laws*, we are assured *are good, if a Man use them lawfully*. His Injunction extends no further than to prohibit all violent and malevolent Prosecutions in Courts of Judicature. — Certainly it is one of the greatest Blessings upon Earth, that we are under Jurisdiction; that we have prescrib'd Rules to go by; Laws to maintain our Right, resolute, faithful, and impartial Magistrates to execute them. Hereby our just Privileges and Properties are secur'd, and Society is regulated. And since we cannot but acknowledge the Greatness of this Blessing we enjoy, we ought to make use of the Means, which God himself has given us for our Defence, and to make the Laws our Security, which he intended shou'd be so.

Now

Now we have consider'd, what Evils we may guard against, and seek to have redress'd by a Legal Proceeding, we find the Commandment of our Saviour does not appear so disagreeable to Human Nature; because we are at Liberty to prosecute those, that have done such Injuries, as ought to have a strict Notice taken of them. We have the *Laws* on our Side, if the Prosecution is just, and *God* also, if it be not malicious.

Let this therefore be a Caution, that we at no Time maliciously, or unjustly engage ourselves in any *Action*; for *great Injuries* will no more justify Malice, and Oppression, than *small ones* a Prosecution. — But this indeed is a Piece of Counsel, which we may rather wish, than expect to have pursued, so long as Men have such various, ungovernable Passions, and opposite Interests; so long as Numbers stand ready to excite Dissentions, to nourish and improve Discord, and Enmity, among Men, and *to justify the wicked for a Reward*.

But I proceed to the

Second Consideration propos'd, *viz.* What Evils we are commanded *not* to resist, and the Motives to this Duty.

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All such as are easy to be born; Such as, without any great Detriment to the Party injur'd, may be overlook'd, and dispens'd with. Thus much may be infer'd from the particular Injuries mention'd in the Verses immediately following the Text; Such as *Smiting on the Cheek*; *taking away a Coat*; *compelling one to go a Mile*, and the like. By these we shou'd form a Judgment of what Injuries we ought to deem Small; and according to our Lord's Directions, remit them. A seeking for Retribution of such Injuries tends only to perpetuate Strife. We shou'd therefore be ready to recede a little from our Right, in Matters of no great Moment, and not let every slight Encroachment upon our Privileges excite our Resentment, and set us one against another. — So that Self-Security, in these Cases, will be no good Plea for Resistance, when Patience much better becomes us. For here not only *private* Revenge, but even exacting of *Legal*, before Men in Power, and Authority, (which, in Strictness of Justice, may perhaps be thought allowable,) is notwithstanding forbidden.

And if we consider the Design of the Precept in the Text, which is directly oppos'd to, what the *Scribes* were so eager for, and the *Jews* daily put in Execution, the *Law of Retaliation*, we
may

may perceive, it was to raise the Spirit of Christians above the Indulgences of a Jewish OEconomy, and make them sit down quietly under Injuries, they cou'd, without any great Inconvenience, bear.

Here indeed lies the Difficulty, to assign what particular Injuries are to be supported by *one*, what by *another*. The same may not be felt by *this* Man, which *that*, (so different are Men's Conditions, and Circumstances) if he does not sue for Justice, may sink under. — This therefore must be left to every one's Discretion, and Conscience, which, if they are faithful, and just, *God* will guide : — Whose *Forbearance* and *Mercy* I shall consider as one Motive to prevail upon us not to resist Evil.

Can we reflect upon his *Mercy*, which is too great for the Heart of Man to conceive, or the Tongues of Men, and Angels to express; which is so infinite, that no Proportion can be thought of between It, and any Thing in this World; No Affection in Nature, which comes in any Degree up to it? (For as to the Love of Mothers to the Fruit of their Womb; And the Heighth of Heaven above the Earth, the *one* hath been always thought only a faint Resemblance, the *other* a very insufficient, and scanty Measure of it.) Can we think of, what his Mercy so e-

minently appears in, *Forgiveness of Sin*? (For He is said to be *Merciful and gracious, slow to Anger, and abundant in Goodness, reserving Mercy for Thousands, and forgiving Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin.*) Can we look back upon the old World, and consider how long his Spirit strove with Man, stopping the Course of Vengeance, as long as it wou'd stand with the Honour of his Justice to forbear? Can we recall the many and great Provocations the *Israelites* gave Him in the Wilderness, and that He notwithstanding bore with them forty Years? Can we turn our Thoughts upon our own daily presumptuous Sins, and at the same Time upon God's waiting, that He may have Mercy? Can we reflect upon that infinite Distance between Him and us, and his Readiness to remit all that we have done in open Defiance almost of his Divine Majesty? Can we think of that inestimable Benefit, the Redemption of Mankind, that stupendous Way of reconciling us to Himself by the precious Blood of his only begotten Son, who gave us so eminent a Pattern of Meekness, Patience, and Long-Suffering; Whom not the greatest Agonies, not the most bitter, and ignominious Death cou'd divert from being solicitous, and praying for, not only those who brought, but even inflicted the *Punishment*, he under-

underwent, upon Him? Can we call to Mind all this, and not forgive one another light Offences?

One of the best Reasons we can give for the Resistance of Evil is, that it is the readiest Way to prevent it. — But if God shou'd take this Course, and not call back his Anger, but stir up all his Wrath; if He, to put a Stop to the Growth of Sin, shou'd immediately cut off a Sinner, our Destruction wou'd be as well very sudden, and general, as very deplorable. For we all, by the Corruption of our Nature, aggravated by the most insolent Presumption of daily repeated Sins, have so far offended Him, that if He shou'd be *extreme to mark all that is done amiss*, we must be of all Creatures living most miserable. But we find, that even those, who presume most on his Kindness, and seem to make his Mercy, which shou'd lead them to Repentance, the Occasion of their sinning; even Those, who sin the more because his Grace abounds, God, who is slow to Anger, and of great Goodness, is pleased to bear with, as long as it is consistent with his Justice.

Let us therefore strive to be like God, who when He descended in the Cloud, pass'd before *Moses*, and proclaim'd his Name, made use of Words to represent Himself, not expressive of Majesty

Majesty, Dominion, and Power, [Such as, *Who stretched out the Heavens like a Curtain, who layeth the Beams of his Chambers in the Waters, who maketh the Clouds his Chariot, who walketh upon the Wings of the Wind, who maketh his Angels Spirits, and his Ministers a flaming Fire, and the like ;*] but Mercy and Tendernefs, [*The Lord, the Lord God, Merciful and Gracious &c.*

And here it may be observ'd, and it will be, I believe, generally acknowledg'd, that a generous Clemency, so far as is consistent with the publick Good, is a most amiable, and commendable Quality in God's Delegates here on Earth ; in Those, who are entrusted with the Administration of the Laws, and who imitate the Lenity of them, by allowing even to great Offenders the Sanctuary, and Protection due to Innocence, till evident Proof, and absolute Necessity shall extort the Sentence of Condemnation.

And let it be the Praise, and Glory of us all to be ready to forgive one another, as God for Christ's Sake forgave us. For there can be no surer Pledge to our Souls, that our Sins are forgiven by God, than that Readiness, which we find in ourselves, to remit those that have injur'd us. * *If we forgive Men their Trespases, our Heavenly Father will also forgive us.*

a Mat. 6. 14.

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Says the Son of Syrac: ^a *One Man beareth Hatred against another, and doth He seek Pardon from the Lord? He sheweth no Mercy to a Man, who is like Himself, and doth he ask Forgiveness for his own Sins? If He that is but Flesh, nourisheth Hatred, who will intreat for Pardon of His Sins?* — Unless therefore we, who stand in so much Need of a favourable, will make the rigorous Judgment our Choice; or unless we can be so extravagantly presumptuous, as to think of finding Mercy, when we have shewn none, let us not resist Evil, when Forbearance is more becoming, and wou'd, as in many Cases it wou'd, be a more effectual Remedy. — And this I shall urge as

Another Motive sufficient, one wou'd think, if we had not so great a Pattern to copy after, to prevail upon us to observe the Duty enjoin'd.

Oftentimes the Malice of an Enemy, which is by Resistance more inflam'd, is by Meekness asswag'd. — This, I know, is quite contrary to the Sense of Men, who are unable to moderate their Passions, or preserve their Temper. They place their Security in, what gives them present Satisfaction, *Revenge*. Which only makes their Safety so much the less, the more it increases their Enemy's Fear; for this stirs up the Fire,

^a *Ecclus.* 28.

which, in all Probability, wou'd otherwise have been extinguish'd. — But we find the opposite Effects of Patience, or Forbearance ; which always lessens the Contention, and either makes a Friend, or puts the Enemy to Shame. So much Good-Nature, and Benevolence is there in the most considerable Part of Mankind, that they are backward in oppressing those that are ready to suffer ; or give Ground for Complaints to such as are unwilling to make any. So much Force and Prevalence there is in Compliance, that every one, who has not entirely shaken off his Humanity, must surely be wrought upon by it. This can scarce fail to influence the worst Disposition, and soften the hardest Temper.

So that we perceive this Virtue, which, many persuade themselves, most subjects Men to Contempt and Affronts, is most likely to prove their greatest Defence. Which we shou'd be perhaps more fully convinc'd of, if we wou'd let this Consideration go along with us ; That it is the Fear of the injur'd Party's Resentments, which commonly induceth the Injurers to pursue their Hatred. But when Those are willing to forget the Affronts, that have been put upon them, These can hardly be so ungenerous as to repeat them.

Yet it has been made an Observation, and perhaps justly, that though the Injured forgive,
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the Injurers seldom do. The Reason seems to be this: They are as seldom perswaded, that their Injustice will be forgot. If they cou'd be satisfied of the other's Good-Will, they wou'd, in all likelihood, embrace their Kindness, accept of Pardon, rejoice at a Reconciliation, and give no more Ground for Complaints.

Another Reason I shall urge for the Security, which Patience gives, and it is this; Men are afraid of giving frequent Provocations to the Patient, lest they shou'd at last be enrag'd, and the Stroke the longer it has been coming, shou'd fall so much the heavier. For it is observable, that Those, who are most difficult to be provok'd, are most in earnest when they are so. Therefore it is prudential, not to be soon mov'd, that others may the more dread the Effects of our Anger; Which, if it was quickly rais'd, they wou'd feel no great Apprehension from its Vehemence. — So that we find it is our Interest, as well as Duty, not to be too hasty to *resist Evil*.

Add to all this, Whosoever is blessed with the Virtue of Forbearance, he is so far from yielding any Indication, as some wou'd insinuate, of a mean, pitiful Temper, that there can be no greater Argument of a brave, and generous Mind. To forgive is an Act of Power, and so far im-

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plys a Superiority, as it gives the Injur'd an Advantage over the Injurers. It is, in a Word, an eminent Mark of true Greatness, and Courage; And they who have arriv'd at such an heavenly Disposition as to be able to pardon, seldom fail of the Victory, which brave Spirits pursue.

Certain it is, that they, who are Superior to common Injuries, which others, either through Weakness, or Wickedness, may be tempted to offer, not only manifest a noble Generosity of Mind, and a most Christian Deportment, but do most effectually secure to themselves that Satisfaction, and Tranquillity, which greatly tends to constitute human Felicity.

— Having perform'd what I propos'd, and shewn, (though to stand upon our own Defence is not only allowable, but requisite and necessary) that no *private*, or *personal* Revenge is lawfull:

— Having consider'd the Nature of the Evils we are to resist, such as are too great to be born, such as Christianity does not forbid, right Reason directs, and common Justice obligeth us to resist; And the Way we are to take in resisting them, by applying ourselves to Persons in Authority, whose Duty it is to defend those from Wrong, that are under their Care and Charge:

— And having likewise spoke of the Evils we are forbid to resist, such as are light, and easy
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to be born ; and enforc'd this Duty by Reasons drawn from the transcendent Mercy of God, the inconceivable Love of our Saviour, and the Security that generally attends those that are patient : I shall conclude with the Apostle's Exhortation, beseeching You, that You will ^a *add to your Patience Godliness, and to Godliness brotherly Kindness, and to brotherly Kindness Charity, For if these Things be in You and abound, Ye shall be neither barren, nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, who teacheth us not only not to resist Evil, but to overcome it with Good.*

a 2 Pet. 1. 6, 7, 8.

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